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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 002394

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SUBJECT: NEPAL: MAOISTS' TOP IDEOLOGUE BHATTARAI

BACK-PEDALS ON THREATS TO AMERICANS

REF: KATHMANDU 2171

Classified By: AMB. MICHAEL E. MALINOWSKI. REASON: 1.5 (B,D).

**¶1.** (C) Summary: In a December 14 interview with the Washington Times, Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai appeared to back-pedal from the implicit threat against American diplomats conveyed in a November 15 communique issued by a regional commander. While it is always difficult to assess the sincerity of Maoist statements--especially those conveyed via Western media--Baburam's softer tone may reflect an attempt by the insurgents to ward off a possible terrorist designation by the USG. End summary.

**¶2.** (SBU) On December 14 the Washington Times website carried the text of a December 7 e-mail interview by Chitra Tiwari, a former Embassy FSN described in the byline as a "Washington-based analyst of international affairs," and Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai. (Note: Tiwari recently has acted as an apologist for Nepal's Maoists. End note.) In the interview, Bhattarai asserted that the six-year-old insurgency "is now peaking toward a climax . . . and a situation of strategic stalemate has developed in the overall sense." While preferring to resolve the conflict "internally," Bhattarai stated that the Maoists "would not mind facilitation or mediation of some genuinely neutral international organizations" under certain conditions.

**¶3.** (U) Nepal's "friends in the West should realize" that true constitutional monarchy is not possible in the country, Bhattarai claimed, and support the Maoists' bid to establish a "democratic republic"--not a communist republic--via elections to a constituent assembly. Discounting any ideological or other ties to the Khmer Rouge, Bhattarai alleged that the Maoists have "already resolved to discard some of the negative and harmful experiences of the international communist movement," claiming that the insurgents are engaged in "a united fight with parliamentary democratic forces against the feudal, autocratic monarchy . . ." When confronted with frequent comparisons of Maoist tactics with those of Cambodia's Khmer Rouge, Bhattarai denied such comparisons and questioned the validity of the many claims of gross human rights violations committed by Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge.

**¶4.** (U) Bhattarai denied that Maoists have extorted money from foreign tourists in Nepal, asserting "It is just impossible that our highly motivated and disciplined cadres would commit such heinous crimes. . . .Foreign tourists are completely safe in our areas, and will be so in future." Nonetheless, he warned tourists not to patronize "big hotels and so-called Nature Conservation Areas (which) are mostly controlled by the ruling Shah-Rana families," and acknowledged "some hazards of getting caught in the crossfire in a situation of raging civil war."

**¶5.** (U) "U.S. government employees and American citizens--for that matter all foreign employees and citizens--are completely safe in Nepal," Bhattarai continued. He parroted the party line, first seen in the November 15 communique from the Kathmandu Valley commander claiming responsibility for the killings of two Embassy security guards (Reftel), that the Maoists "have no policy of harming or attacking any foreign national unless they are found working against the revolutionary movement." With respect to the assassinations of the two guards, "the party has reviewed the cases and resolved that henceforth, if any such charges are leveled against any such employee, the concerned embassy would be advised before action is taken. However, we would caution the enlightened American people to beware of the xenophobic propaganda of the U.S. government to hide its nefarious agenda."

**¶6.** (C) Comment: Since so many of the statements in the interview, including the denial that Maoists extort money from foreign tourists; the claim that the Maoists do not seek a one-party Communist state; and the oblique defense of Pol Pot, are patently false, it is difficult to have full confidence in Bhattarai's pledge that the Maoists will henceforth notify us before executing any of our employees. It is clear, however, that the Maoists dislike being tagged as terrorists (the Maoist student union has demanded the

government lift the terrorist label from their organization as a condition for ending the current educational strike), and are anxious to avoid the sanctions and international opprobrium that would come with such a designation by the USG. Bhattarai's statements may reflect an effort, at least by the Maoist leadership, to mollify the USG and avert such a designation. If his intent is to signal a lessened threat to our Mission personnel and the American community, we welcome it.

MALINOWSKI